**You may earn a maximum of 3 points toward your final grade by doing the above and answering the questions and submitting them on time (no later than 12:01 Sunday, Jan. 21). Any worksheets submitted after the deadline will get a 0.**

**You will be rewarded a maximum of 3 points, if I judge your work to be above average. You will receive 2 points if your work is average, that is it may have a few minor mistakes in some of the answers but demonstrates correct grammar and indicates that some, but not all, of the answers, are acceptable and well expressed. You will earn only 1 point if you simply answered the questions and/or if you use poor grammar and if there are signs that you have not read the material on which your answers are based.**

1. In the space below, describe the stasis at the beginning of Trifles. In other words, “Where are we?” “When is it (time, day, and year)?” “Who are the people involved?” “What is the dramatic situation in which the characters find themselves as the play unfolds?”

At the beginning of the play, the audience is introduced to the characters: Mrs. Hale, Mr. Hale, Mrs. Peters, the Sheriff, and the County Attorney. It is a cold morning during the winter of 1916 and the five of them are entering the Wright house to search for evidence regarding the murder of Mr. Wright.

2. What is the intrusion that causes the stasis to be broken and the dramatic action to develop, often at an increasingly rapid pace, to the end of the play?

The intrusion of Trifles appears to be the polarizing comment made by Mr. Hale: “Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.” This statement breaks the initial stasis or sending ripples outward, allowing the play to develop. Immediately after this is said, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale move closer to one another (dictated in stage directions). Their response to this comment sets up the foundations for the rest of the plot by causing the women to (literally/physically and emotionally) band together. Tension between the males and females grows and becomes oppositional, thus creating a sense of defense born loyalty among the women to their own sex. This gender-loyalty causes the two women to sympathize and identify with Mrs. Wright, which ultimately leads to their decision to hide the evidence and save Mrs. Wright.

3. Why do the events of the play take place at this particular time and place? In other words, what is the unique factor that is out of the ordinary that causes a turn of events to take place?

The play takes place several years before women earned the right to vote. In essence, women were at a severe political and social disadvantage during this time. They were viewed as inferior and were confined to a purely domestic role. This aspect of society during this time period is precisely what allows the story to unfold in the way it does. The decision by Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale to cover up Mrs. Wrights’ crime was motivated by the fact that women were routinely discriminated against, especially in a court system setting.

4. State the dramatic question or questions that must be answered by the end of the play? (Ordinarily, the dramatic question shares a close connection with the intrusion.)

* What was the motive behind the murder of Mr. Wright?
* What will the women decide to do?

5. Use Ms. Hale to answer the questions concerning character. Ball says, a character is revealed by what he/she does, that is the dramatic actions that are taken. Examine what the character wants (NOTE: In Trifles the wants of Ms. Hale change as the play progresses). The wants of a character often encounter obstacles that get in the way of achieving those wants. Ball says there are 4 kinds of obstacles that frustrate the wants of a character. They are: a. Me against myself, b. Me against another individual, c. Me against society (that is law, social norms, etc.) and, d. Me against fate, the universe, natural forces, God or the gods. In answering these questions be sure to point to the particular obstacles that demonstrate these obstacles for Ms. Hale.

Mrs. Hale’s character shows a vast amount of conflictions within a very short period of time/ script. Mrs. Hale’s first obstacle reveals itself immediately within her initial lines. The County Attorney, observing Mrs. Wright’s messy kitchen, criticizes Mrs. Wright’s capability as a housekeeper and wife, and therefore, as a woman. Mrs. Hale defends Mrs. Wright and women in general, and several retorts about the roles of women and men are made by both parties. The tense exchange between Mrs. Hale and the Attorney polarizes the scene, creating a clear demarcation of women (Mrs. Hale/me against men). This small interaction reveals a larger, societal obstacle facing all women at the time: the conventional inferiority of women and their strictly domestic role.

This sense of female-comradery continues over the course of the play. As the plot progresses, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters slowly piece together hints of foul-play and suspect a broken home being the foundation for the murder. This conclusion, although remaining unspoken, awakens another obstacle: Mrs. Hale against herself. Mrs. Hale begins to develop a sense of guilt, saying that if she had been a better neighbor to Mrs. Wright, things would not have turned out so tragically. This remorse creates an internal conflict within Mrs. Hale.

However, Mrs. Hale’s focus shifts from the past to the present; facing the obstacle that is perhaps the axial point of the entire play: the fate of Mrs. Wright. It is made clear from the instant that the play begins that Mrs. Wright is assumed guilty and evidence to support this assumption is the only thing that stands between Mrs. Wright and her sentence. In other words, it is clear that the Mrs. Wright’s fate rests on the discovery (or lack thereof) of incriminating evidence. By the end of the play, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, determined to save Mrs. Wright, cover up incriminating evidence. In essence, the two women band together to change Mrs. Wright’s fate.

6. The most important information in most plays takes place during theatrical moments. In your estimation what is the most theatrical moment in Trifles and what happens during that moment which is so important to the outcome of the play?

For me, the most theatrical moment in Trifles was when Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters found the little bird with its’ neck wrung. Upon finding the bird, the two women know with certainty that Mr. Wright killed the bird and Mrs. Wright killed him in an act of revenge. Essentially, the dead creature acts as a physical embodiment of Mrs. Wright’s motive and guilt. It is arguably the most incriminating piece of evidence against Mrs. Wright. Finding the bird immediately creates a sense of pressure and suspense; the men are about to come back, so the two women have to think and act fast in order to put together the rest of their story (as to how and why the murder played out) and decide what to do. Ultimately, they managed to cover up the evidence just in time as the men entered the room. This quick, time pressured dialogue creates a tangible suspense within the audience, successfully emphasizing the dramatic action leading up to the ultimate decision to cover up Mrs. Wright’s crime.

7. Provide at least three examples of images in Trifles. How does the title of the play help us understand the images in the play? (Remember Ball says that, “An image is the use of something we know that tells us something we don’t know.” He goes on to say that images invoke and expand, rather than define and limit.”)

The title of the play, Trifles, accompanied by the infamous line “Well, women are used to worrying over trifles,” provides the audience with a sense of what is significant and why. Trifles are little things that are fussed over and that are subjectively significant. Throughout the play, the evidence that the men are so concerned with is ironically found by the women in the same little details or “trifles” that they (the women) were reprimanded for being concerned with. Some of the images that portray these evidence containing trifles are the mis-stitched quilt (reveals signs of Mrs. Wright’s distress), the mangled door-hinge and the smashed preserves (both of which serve as evidence for foul-play).

8. Ordinarily, there are many themes in most plays. List the themes in Trifles.

* Gender roles/ conventions
* Identity- the dual identity of ‘Minnie Foster vs. Mrs. Wright’; the collective female identity (as a social group).
* Slanted Justice- variation in perceptions of what is considered right; the biased legal system; fighting back against injustice (discrimination and prejudice against females) by doing something morally wrong (lying to saving a murderer).
* Patriarchal Society- male-dominated society (what men say, goes)
* Death- both in a literal and metaphorical sense: Mr. Wright killed the part of Mrs. Wright that was Minnie Foster (symbolized by the canary); Mrs. Wright killed her husband; the euphemism of “stillness”; solving the murder case.

9. Most American plays have something to do with family and/or family relationships. What does family have to do with Trifles? Is family redefined in Trifles?

In Trifles, the absence of family is more significant than the presence of it. Mr. and Mrs. Wright had no children together, they didn’t build a family. The household is empty and definitively lonely. In this time period, the purpose of a marriage was to build a family. However, the Wrights had no children. This could be interpreted as being the clearest, most basic evidence of an unhappy marriage. Family, or in this case, the absence of it, sheds light into the nature of Mr. and Mrs. Wrights’ dysfunctional, detrimental marriage.